

Strategies in Dealing with Problem Properties in Dayton's Bluff

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to describe various strategies utilized when dealing with the issue of problem properties. These strategies are derived from the work done by Dayton's Bluff Community Council. This neighborhood organization created the People Aligning Communities Together (PACT) committee, which is comprised of homeowners, landlords, tenants and members of different organizations. The main focus of the PACT committee is to find solutions to problem properties in the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood. Even though the strategies described in this report are used by this specific community organization, many can be transferred to other city neighborhoods. This report also contains background on other programs that different neighborhoods have developed to confront this same issue. In addition, it includes some of the existing data resources that are useful when dealing with this problem.

Background

- According to a report done by the St. Paul City Council Research Center, "[t]here are approximately 150-250 chronic problem properties in Saint Paul at any given time. A sample of problem properties indicated that 44% were single family houses, 37% were duplexes, an 19% were apartment buildings with three or more units." (Saint Paul 1).

- The conditions of the housing stock are a major concern for Dayton's Bluff Community Council. A large number of properties in the area date back to the late 19th century. These properties represent a priceless historical heritage, but in order to be kept in good condition, they need periodical maintenance work done on them. This is not an easy task in a neighborhood like Dayton's Bluff which has, as most inner city communities, suffered a process of disinvestment over the last five decades.

- The concentration of poverty in the area worsens the situation. According to the 1990 Census of Population and Housing, the median household income in Planning District 4, where Dayton's Bluff is located, is \$23,659. The median household income for the state of Minnesota in the year the census was realized was \$40,991.

- The Exterior Conditions Survey, carried out by Dayton's Bluff Task Force Members and other supporting neighborhood organizations in 1996, states that "[s]ix to ten buildings require some degree of repair work to return the buildings to sound condition. Compared to building conditions in 1988...in the aggregate the condition of the housing stock has deteriorated further...Concentrations of deficient housing identified in the 1988 survey remain, particularly in the oldest neighborhoods in the north and west areas of Dayton's Bluff" (Dayton's Bluff 1).

- The poor physical conditions of a large portion of the housing market, added to social problems that are building-based (e.g., drug trafficking), motivated the Community Council to form the PACT committee as a way to attack the issue of problem properties.

Defining “Problem Property”

There is not one single definition of what a problem property is. Different programs that deal with this issue have defined the term “problem property” in ways that were related to the goals they were pursuing and the methodology they were using. In the case of Dayton’s Bluff Community Council, the meaning of “problem property” was left open to be defined by the members of the PACT committee. There were not any predetermined characteristics that a property had to meet in order to be considered a “problem property”. Because of that, community members were able to bring properties to the table that they considered “problematic” for a wide range of reasons. The problems that pertained to that property were then described by the community member and the committee would decide together whether the property should or should not be included on a *problem property* list.

This open-ended approach to the definition resulted in properties that were considered problematic for issues such as:

- Property in run down conditions (e.g. lack of paint work, filthy carpets)
- Tenants’ disorderly conduct
- Drug-related activities
- Dirty yards (e.g. abandoned cars, trash)
- Drinking in public
- No shoveling
- Loose animals

This list of problems can be broken down into different categories according to the party most directly responsible for each issue. Examples of these are:

- Tenant as the main party at fault: Disorderly conduct, drinking in public, loitering.
- Landlord as the main party at fault: Run down properties, no shoveling, poor or no tenant screening. Problems were significantly harder to resolve in those cases of absentee landlord.
- Tenant and landlord both at fault: Dirty yards, drug activities.

Determining who is mostly responsible for the existing problem is very important, especially at the stage of establishing the strategies to attack the problem. The person who is most responsible for causing the problem is also the person that should be contacted first when trying to solve it. This person’s actions will directly affect the resolution of the problem.

Other Definitions of “Problem Property”

A number of programs that deal with this issue have opted for defining “problem property” in a more systematic and objective form. The ways in which “problem property” is defined can be related to practical issues within the implementation of each program.

NEWS (The Neighborhood Early Warning System) in Chicago

This program is run by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), a non-profit organization, “as part of an affirmative neighborhood information strategy to increase community access to local government information” (NEWS). NEWS also intends to monitor real estate trends and to prevent housing abandonment in Chicago’s inner city neighborhoods.

This program uses seven indicators in order to determine “problem properties”:

- Code violations
- Housing court cases
- Water arrears
- Current property tax delinquencies – annual sale
- Severe property tax delinquencies – scavenger sale
- Fire records
- Real estate sales, buyer and assessment information

NKLA (Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles)

This project created by the Community Building Institute (CBI) and UCLA’s School of Public Policy and Social Research intends to “provide better access to public information about property deterioration and community development” (NKLA 2). The main part of NKLA is “LANews” (Los Angeles Neighborhood Early Warning System), which maintains a database with certain housing indicators that are believed to lead to nuisance properties and neighborhood decay. The indicators used in this project are the following:

- Property tax delinquency
- Building code violations
- Health code violations
- Slum Enforcement (“when buildings [in the city of Los Angeles] have serious physical problems and when normal code enforcement has not worked, buildings are sometimes referred to Slum Enforcement or special taskforces”) (NKLA 18)
- Fire records
- Environmental information

Saint Paul City Council Research Report on Remedies for Chronic Problem Properties

This report states that “[a] chronic problem property is a property with which neighbors, neighborhoods and/or City have struggled over a long period of time, because of property maintenance code violations and possibly criminal activity” (Saint Paul 1). While examining the nature of chronic problem properties in Saint Paul, this report also investigates the policy options that are available to better deal with these properties. “For purposes of th[e] study a *problem property* is one which:

- 1) Disrupts or threatens the peace, health and safety of the community, or
- 2) Constitutes a nuisance or an eyesore and is dilapidated or deteriorated, or
- 3) Creates an attractive nuisance which is an abode for criminal activity, or
- 4) Is not maintained adequately and does not conform to minimum health and housing laws.

And, therefore, a chronic problem property is one which does any of these on a 'regular' basis, or repeatedly" (Saint Paul 2).

The Approach of Dayton's Bluff Community Council to Problem Properties

At PACT's first meeting, community members unanimously agreed to focus on problem properties along Maria Avenue. This street is a main artery of the Dayton's Bluff neighborhood. Several properties were in serious need of improvement, be it for maintenance reasons or social problems. Improving the conditions of the properties along Maria Avenue was expected to trigger further improvements along the surrounding streets.

The successful example of the Lyndale Neighborhood Association (LNA) acted as a positive precedent. The Lyndale neighborhood in south Minneapolis faced similar problem property issues to those faced by Dayton's Bluff. This neighborhood tackled this problem by having periodical meetings with the goal of looking for solutions to problem properties. The owners of the problem properties, city inspectors, health agencies workers, police, and child protection workers were also participants of these meetings (Barisonzi). This program has helped to eradicate nuisance properties which in turn has resulted in an increase of real estate values and decrease of crime activities in the neighborhood.

Dayton's Bluff Community Council used many of the strategies developed by the Lyndale Neighborhood Association when creating their own program. Joe Barisonzi, executive coordinator of Lyndale Neighborhood Association, acted as a consultant to the PACT committee.

Dynamics of the PACT Committee

Lasting for one and a half hours, once every three weeks, PACT committee meetings dedicate the majority of the time to the discussion of the housing units on the problem property list. Even though there are more potential problem properties, the committee decided to limit the number of cases on the list to four to six properties. This number is based on their estimated maximum work capacity, but it could be increased in succeeding stages.

A problem property is added to the list upon the request of a committee member or a meeting attendant. This person has to present the reasons why he/she believes the

property should be included on the list. Someone must be responsible for a property in order for it to be added to the list. This person is the *contact person*; it can be anyone who has a direct relationship to the property or a personal interest in improving the conditions of the property. One of the main points behind the idea of designating a contact person is that people from the community are the ones taking responsibility to solve the problem. It is not the community organizer, nor the council member taking action, rather someone from the community. The responsibility of the contact person is to closely follow each of the steps that are taken in respect to the property. This person also has to update the committee at each meeting on the latest developments on the property.

The first step, once a property is added to the list, is to inform the property's residents and owner that PACT has labeled their property as a "problem property". The owners and tenants are then invited to participate and look for solutions in the next committee's meeting. Only if the owner and residents do not respond or do not attend the following meeting will the committee take any further steps. The goal, however, is to have owners and residents involved. In the majority of the cases, they are the ones who can directly take action to fix the problems.

Once a property is added to the list, it is necessary to clearly identify what the real problem is. In some cases, the identification of the problem can be very simple. In other cases it is not so easy, and therefore collecting information becomes very important. The main goal of clearly identifying the problem is to determine what can be fixed by the residents, what can be fixed by the owner, and what can be fixed by other parties (e.g. city government).

At each PACT meeting, the contact person is in charge of an update on his/her property. After the update, the attendants discuss the next steps.

A property will be taken off the list when the committee believes that the problems have been solved. It has happened, however, that even after a property has been taken off the list, it has been put back on at a later date because problems had arose again.

Members of the PACT Committee

The PACT committee is open to anyone who is interested in working in the issue of problem properties in Dayton's Bluff. The majority of its members are **residents of the area**. As part of the dynamics of PACT, **landlords, tenants and homeowners**, whose properties are on the problem property list, are especially encouraged to participate.

Unfortunately, not all problems have been able to be resolved by the sole presence of neighborhood residents, tenants and landlords. In many cases, other organizations have provided their services in order to help correct the situation. A major asset of PACT has been the presence of members of different organizations that in one way or another are interested in finding solutions for the problem properties in Dayton's Bluff. Their direct

involvement with the PACT committee has allowed for prompt and efficient answers to the wide range of problems presented by the properties.

In turn, the organizations that are present at the PACT meetings are able to get a first hand look at the problems that are affecting this Saint Paul community. This direct experience provides the organizations with knowledge on how to improve their strategies to better serve the needs of their clientele or constituents.

- **City of Saint Paul, Council Member**

The city council member that represents the ward of which Dayton's Bluff is part of is a member of the PACT committee. This presence is very important since it provides a good connection between the politics at the city level and the neighborhood needs. Carrying out a program that deals with the issue of problem properties in a neighborhood can be made significantly easier when the city has a sincere interest in tackling the problem.

- **City of Saint Paul, Division of Code Enforcement**

Inspectors from Code Enforcement are also part of PACT's meetings. Code Enforcement is the agency in the city of Saint Paul that is in charge of periodic building inspections. Inspections can also be done based on complaints about specific properties. Inspectors are usually assigned to certain city parts. Having a Code Enforcement inspector as part of meeting proved very useful for PACT since they are familiar with the physical conditions of each of the problem properties. They also provide updated information on the state of each property's file.

- **City of Saint Paul, Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED)**

This department deals with policies that relate to the growth of the city of Saint Paul. The provision of adequate housing is one of the main issues tackled by the PED.

The PED has helped Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services in the process of buying properties from problematic owners.

- **Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services (DFNHS)**

This agency works with the creation of programs that intend to improve the housing conditions in the area. Among other things, DFNHS has promoted rehabilitation programs that have improved the conditions of a significant number of properties in Dayton's Bluff.

DFNHS has played a major role in the PACT committee by buying problem properties whose owners no longer wanted to own them. These properties can then be rehabilitated and put back on the market either as single family or as multi family housing.

- **Focusing Our Resources on Community Empowerment (FORCE)**

FORCE, a unit within the Saint Paul Police Department, takes part in PACT's meeting. FORCE is dedicated to working with the citizens of Saint Paul to combat the problems of street level narcotics, problem properties and disruptive behavior at the neighborhood level. FORCE works with block clubs and neighborhood groups to deter and displace street dealers, crack houses and problem properties.

FORCE agents are a very important asset to the PACT committee since they have a good knowledge of which properties are the ones generating the greater demand for police intervention. Their presence at the meetings is also helpful in the sense that they advise community residents on the best ways to report suspicious activities taking place in their neighborhood.

- **Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services**

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services is a law office for low-income persons and senior citizens, providing free legal help to eligible persons. Housing is one of the main areas covered by this legal office.

An attorney from this law office was present at every PACT meeting. This attorney provided the committee with answers to the many legal questions that arise when dealing with problem properties. This attorney also provided legal advising and legal representation to tenants living in problem properties.

Collecting information

While the first step in the process -adding a property to the problem property list- may be based on perceptions, the following steps require the collection of data. Having correct and up-to-date information about each problem property is crucial in order to find efficient solutions. This report will only cover those information sources that have been most useful when dealing with problem properties.

Previous NPCR's reports have already examined the issue of housing data collection. One example is the report done by Stephanie Kellner "Accessing Housing Data in Saint Paul and Ramsey County, Minnesota".

- **IRIS (Integrated Realty Information System)**

IRIS is an online property information service. This service provides property tax records, photographs of the properties, parcel and street maps and demographic information. In the case of the Twin Cities, Ramsey County is the area with best coverage by IRIS. Tax records for this county are updated daily. Washington County and Anoka County's tax records are updated annually.

The program is relatively user-friendly and allows for simple queries as well as those more complex. The main benefit of IRIS is that a wide range of data items can be accessed by using this unified database.

This online database can only be accessed by those who have hired this online service. However, a one-week long free demonstration is available from the company's web-site.

Data items that can be accessed from IRIS (non exhaustive list):

- Parcel ID number
- Fee owner name
- Taxpayer name
- Taxpayer address
- Homestead name
- Property address
- Tax delinquency
- Plat name
- Legal description
- Market value (land and building)
- Number of units
- Lot's frontage and depth

IRIS Twin Cities phone number: (651) 659-9232

IRIS Twin Cities fax number: (651) 659-9219

IRIS web-site: www.remapcorp.com

- **Saint Paul Police Department, FORCE Unit**

The FORCE Unit provides information related to calls for police service. The information can be property based (police calls related to one specific property) or block/intersection based (police calls related to one specific block or street intersection).

In the case of a small number of files, FORCE faxes them. For larger files it is possible to arrange FORCE to deliver the data in computer disks.

FORCE Unit phone number: (651) 292-3712

FORCE Unit fax number: (651) 774-3510

- **Saint Paul Water Utility**

Updated information on water service records can be obtained from this office (e.g. water shut-offs). Various problem property warning systems (e.g. NEWS Neighborhood Early Warning System in Chicago and "Predicting Housing Abandonment in Minneapolis' Central Neighborhood: Creating an Early Warning System" by Lori Mardock) use water arrears as one of the main risk indicators. Running water is such a basic need that the non-payment of this service would indicate an advanced stage of carelessness towards the property.

Information such as the property's parcel ID number, plat name and legal description are usually requested by this office in order to obtain the data.

Saint Paul Water Utility phone number: (651) 266-6350

Saint Paul Water Utility fax number: (651) 292-7537

- **City of Saint Paul, Division of Code Enforcement**

Complaint files of each property are available from this office. Complaints in these files refer to the properties' physical conditions (e.g. debris in yard, mice infestation, need of paint). It is also possible to find out whether a property has an open file or not; an open file indicates that the inspector understands that the stated problem is not yet resolved.

Code Enforcement phone number: (651) 266-8440

Code Enforcement fax number: (651) 266-8426

- **Photographs**

Taking pictures is especially important during the documenting stage and it is a very useful addition to the data collected. They are also useful in clearly illustrating a property's problems to the committee members.

Strategies Used by PACT in Order to Find Solutions to Problem Properties

Given the wide range of problem types presented by the different problem properties, there was a need for an equally wide range of answers. The strategies can come from any of the committee members that find possible solutions to the problems.

As it was already mentioned, the first step after a property is added to the problem property list is to invite the landlord/owner and tenants to participate in the following PACT meeting. In the case that they are not willing to participate nor work towards finding solutions to the problem, then the committee moves on to different strategies.

Strategies such as Rent Escrow and Tenants Remedy Action are used only in those cases when negotiations between tenants and landlords have not been successful. It is cheaper and more effective to have repair issues resolved between the tenant and the landlord before resorting to legal procedures.

The strategies that are discussed in this report do not intend to cover all the existing strategies when dealing with problem properties. This is merely a list of the strategies that have been used by PACT since the committee was started. Even though most strategies could be transferred to other neighborhoods dealing with similar problems, some of the strategies are specific to the Dayton's Bluff case.

Strategies to help prevent problem properties

- **Canvassing the neighborhood**

PACT used canvassing as a way to inform the residents about the existence, goals and activities of the committee. Before each meeting, passing out flyers in the neighborhood would take place as a way to invite residents to participate and also to keep them informed about the latest news on PACT. Resident participation is seen as a crucial element in order for the program to succeed, therefore is necessary to establish an effective communication link between the committee and the residents.

- **Canvassing a particular property**

This strategy was used as a way to get tenants from specific buildings involved. It was mainly used in the case of multi-family buildings that were on the problem property list. Since the participation of the tenants that live in problem properties is so important in the search for solutions, PACT members would go door to door informing residents about the committee's activities and also inviting them to participate.

- **Stricter tenant screening**

A number of properties have a long history of problem tenants. In such a tight housing market as the one today, landlords should have no problem in finding good tenants for their properties. Even if the property has to sit empty for some time, it would be more economical for a landlord to rent to good tenants rather than renting to people who will later be a cause of concern for the landlord and the neighborhood.

- **D.O.G.S. (Drugs Out! Get Straight!)**

D.O.G.S. is neighborhood patrol that pursues three main goals:

- Interacting with residents in the neighborhood.
- Reporting and documenting on criminal activity.
- Interacting with other agencies such as FORCE and Code Enforcement.

Even though D.O.G.S' main objective is not to tackle the problem property issue, the group can be a main asset in identifying problematic properties in the neighborhood. It can also play a major role in discouraging illegal activities such as street level drug trafficking. D.O.G.S. sends a clear message that there are people who care about the neighborhood and are working to improve the living conditions.

- **Tenants "get-togethers"**

A tenant get-together is any kind of activity, usually organized by the landlord, which creates a chance for tenants to meet each other. One of the most common obstacles when trying to solve problems in multi-family buildings is the fact that tenants do not know the people who live in their own building. Often, there are not many opportunities in which

tenants can get to know their neighbors. Landlords sponsor these activities as an effort to improve the livability of the buildings.

- **Private security guards**

As a way to improve the security of the neighborhood, landlords pooled resources in order to pay for private security guards. Similar experiences in other neighborhoods have shown that incidents such as drug trafficking and loitering decrease with the presence of private guards. It is also expected that by increasing security, the perception of the neighborhood would also improve.

Strategies to deal with existing problem properties

- **Call FORCE Unit**

FORCE keeps a list of problem properties to which they pay special attention. FORCE does not recognize a property as problematic unless it is on their problem property list. One of the factors that FORCE takes into consideration when adding a property to their list is the number of calls for police service, related to that property. Neighbors of a property in which suspicious activities take place can improve police surveillance of that property by reporting it to FORCE. Many people, however, feel somewhat doubtful about calling the police to report suspicious activities. FORCE agents present at PACT meetings instructed and encouraged residents to call the police when they witness illegal activities. Another advantage of this strategy is the fact that the number of police agents assigned to an area can be raised when there is an increment in the number of calls for police service to that area.

FORCE “maintains an organized/formalized relationship between Public Health, Fire Prevention, and the Police Department” (Saint Paul 17). This net of relationships, added to their work with block clubs and neighborhood groups, helps FORCE address the issue of problem properties in a quite effective way.

- **Call Code Enforcement**

This strategy pursues the goal of alerting the appropriate City agencies about the problems that a property has. As part of their rights, tenants living in housing with code violations that are not being corrected by the landlord can call a housing, health, energy, or fire inspector. Tenants, however, are not the only ones who can make these phone calls; residents living near problem properties can also call in order to complain about the conditions of those properties. The Office of Citizen Services, or an enforcement department, are the ones that usually receive this type of call. According to the “Study of Remedies for Chronic Problem Properties” done by the Saint Paul City Council Research Center, “[o]f the estimated 40,000 calls Citizen Services receives annually, there are approximately 25,000 calls for service, more than half of which (14,000-15,000) are housing and nuisance code-related” (14).

The city must verify that complaints received are actual code violations, which in almost all cases requires an inspection. Response time to individual complaints varies based on the enforcement department's current work load and the type of complaint. For example, a life-safety complaint, such as 'no heat' will under almost all circumstances elicit a same-day response from the enforcement department. Other complaints are generally handled in two to three working days, although for less serious issues, such as 'tall grass and weeds,' there may be up to five day response time. (Saint Paul 14)

Options available to City agencies once complaints are confirmed by inspectors

- Warning

"...[T]he least forceful option available, but in some cases it is sufficient to get code compliance. Owners are warned of violations in about 5% of cases" (Saint Paul 20).

- Correction Notice

"A correction notice is normally issued when a code violation is found. The property in violation of the code will then be reinspected to determine if the violation was corrected. If the violation has not been corrected, the inspector may issue a citation to the property owner." (Saint Paul 20).

- Summary Abatement

This process is used "to eliminate public health and safety nuisances such as tall grass and noxious weeds, unshoveled snow on public sidewalks, abandoned motor vehicles, broken sewer lines, dilapidated garages, etc...[T]he owner must clean-up or fix the code violation within a specified number of days or the City will abate the violation...The summary abatement process is very effective for quick removal of nuisances, but it does very little to prevent or discourage future violations" (Saint Paul 20).

- Citation

Citations are usually used after other enforcement tools have failed. "Most citations are based on violations of the building, housing and zoning chapters of the Legislative Code" (Saint Paul 21)

- Condemnation

This enforcement tool is used when inspectors find housing violations such as lack of basic facilities (e.g heat, water), or severe rodent infestation that would make the housing unit unsuitable for human habitation. Once a residential unit has been condemned or declared as unfit for human habitation, it has to be vacated by the specified date (Saint Paul 22).

Possible results after the use of code enforcement tools

- Ramsey County Housing Court

This court is in charge of dealing with cases of housing code violations, as well as tenant/landlord disputes and evictions through unlawful detainer process.

- Revocation of Certificate of Occupancy

“If a building is required to have a Certificate of Occupancy (C of O), and is found to be repeatedly or consistently in violation of the applicable sections of the Legislative code, the Fire Marshall may revoke the building’s C of O. Because a building covered by the C of O requirement must have one in order to be inhabited, such a revocation would close a building for use” (Saint Paul 25).

- Case Managing/Ongoing Monitoring

This program is run by Public Health and its goal is to “proactively address problematic properties...through a coordinated program of enforcement with the Police Department, other agencies and neighborhood associations. The inspector works closely with the owner and, if applicable, the tenants, in order to bring the property into compliance with the City’s property maintenance codes” (Saint Paul 25).

- Problem Remains

According to the City of Saint Paul Council Research report, there are cases in which a property remains a problem even after code enforcement tools have been used. In those cases the property “remain[s] in ‘the system’ until the violation is corrected” (Saint Paul 26). In other cases, the code violation is fixed and after a certain amount of time the same or similar code violations are present once again.

- **Send letter with signatures to attorneys dealing with code violation cases**

As an example of this strategy, a letter with signatures from residents and property owners was sent to the City Attorney who was dealing with a problem property case (the City Attorney at the Housing Court is in charge of prosecuting Housing Code violations). The letter informed the attorney about PACT’s activities and goals. Residents signed the letter requesting the attorney to prosecute the owner of the property so that he would understand that there are penalties for mismanaging a property in the way he did. A letter with signatures also shows the City Attorney that the residents do care about their neighborhood and that they would not tolerate landlords that do not take care of their properties.

- **Dayton’s Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services (DBNHS) intervention**

This organization’s mission is to improve the existing housing stock, encourage reinvestment, and increase the awareness of a better neighborhood through the combined efforts of residents, financial institutions, businesses, government and the insurance industry. DBNHS has been involved in the process of buying properties that have a history

of being problematic in the neighborhood in order to rehabilitate and sell them through homeownership programs.

- **Rent Escrow**

“Tenants may place rent in an escrow account when a landlord will not correct housing violations. Under the Rent Escrow Law, tenants can pay their rent to the court rather than to the landlord, and ask the court to order the landlord to make repairs.” (Minnesota Attorney 13). The landlord does not have access to the rent money until the repairs are made. Legal Aid attorneys can help tenants living in problem properties to start escrows in cases that are fitting.

- **Tenants Remedy Action**

When emergency housing services are affected because of property owner’s negligence, a judge can appoint an administrator to run the property. (For a more detailed definition, see *Landlords and Tenants: Rights and Responsibilities*, Office of the Minnesota Attorney General Hubert Humphrey III). The court administrator makes the repairs that are needed using money from one of several sources: URAP funds, mortgages taken out on the property by the court administrator, or rental income generated by the property. PACT used this strategy in collaboration with Legal Aid attorneys that represented the tenants. The strategy was used as a way to improve the housing conditions in properties whose owners did not provide the required upkeep.

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